



Pastor's Pen

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- Fr. Tom Wilson, Pastor

FREEDOM IN CHRIST

As I prepare this article, I know that fireworks will be enjoyed from the parking lot and back lawn of All Saints next week, giving residents the best view of the colorful air explosions in Lakeville. Of course, it is the Fourth of July, an opportunity for a long weekend and family gatherings. Generally, it is a relaxing time. But it is more than a long weekend and fireworks. It is a time to remember freedom and the signing of the Declaration of Independence. It was our nation's Founders' announcement not just to England, but the rest of the world, that we were free for "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." For people of faith, it is also a time to remember what freedom is and where it comes from.

Barrels of ink have been spilled on freedom in the last 243 years. People want to be free. We are made in freedom of love by God. It is as simple as that. We are at a crossroads in our experiment in freedom and self-government in our country and the western world. Who gives us our rights and who makes us free? Is it a self-gift? Is freedom given to us by a human entity? Or is it a self-evident right endowed by our Creator? How one answers those question forms the basis of one's view of the world.

We are a free country of free people, a truth for which we can all be thankful. But we would be naïve if we did not notice the lack of freedom that surrounds us. Whether it rests in the worry and anxiousness of our own hearts, or our observations in ourselves, or loved one's behavior that they can no longer control. The evidence is overwhelming that even though we are made free, we do not preserve the gift individually or collectively.

The more distant we are from God as a people and individuals, the more likely we are to perceive that freedom is something generated by humanity and not by God, and the more likely we are to give it away. Our freedom comes from and exists in God. It is God who has endowed us with freedom, and this truth is self-evident as the Founders declared in 1776. Public officials in all branches run amok when they begin to behave like they are the givers and arbiters of freedom. They are not. God is, and the Founders understood that. We are "endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights, and among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." If the government or any other person or entity believes it is the one that bestows these rights, we are in trouble, because they can then take them away. As the Declaration says, "to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men." The government does not give us these divine rights. It only acknowledges them.

Despite our publicly acknowledged freedom and as God's primordial gift to us, we choose to misuse the gift and see our freedom distorted or in decline. Even in that quagmire of human frailty and hubris, that freedom can be restored. In honoring God, acknowledging our redemption in Jesus, and humbling ourselves before the source of freedom, our decayed freedom is restored in Christ. That freedom allows us to live free of fear and in the space of being able live as God desires and not as the world prescribes.

When we operate from the core understanding that freedom is not primarily political and granted by a government, but is spiritual and given by God, we know can that it can never be taken away, no matter what happens politically. The freedom that we know as people redeemed in Christ is a permanent gift meant to assist in living in the heart of God. The freedom that God gives us allows us to graciously choose to do the right thing, and not just whatever we may be compelled to do. In the end, the freedom we enjoy gives us the ability to say no to what is not of God.

When we see the fireworks and rejoice in the blessings of a free country, we need to remember that it is not just a long weekend, but also a celebration of freedom given to us by God and recognized by our Founders. This midsummer holiday, we can both be grateful for freedom and ask to have it restored in Christ.

Happy Fourth of July!